

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis
Committee on Government Reform
“Eradicating Steroid Use, Part IV: Examining the Use of Steroids by Young Women
to Enhance Athletic Performance and Body Image”
June 15, 2005

This is the fourth hearing of the Committee on Government Reform on the use of steroids, a public health crisis that reaches from the highest levels of professional sports down to the ball fields and school yards across the country.

Throughout our inquiry, we have sounded a familiar theme: A culture of steroid use among professional athletes, while troubling by itself, is also worrisome for its trickle down effect. In the absence of strong testing regimes, pro athletes use performance-enhancing drugs to stay ahead of the competition. College athletes feel pressured to use steroids to get drafted. High school kids believe steroids are the ticket to bigger, faster bodies that will attract the attention of scouts and college coaches, and maybe lead to a scholarship. And the cycle goes on and on and on

These pressures are real, and they sometimes have tragic consequences, as we heard from the Hooton and Garibaldi families during our first hearing. Their sons killed themselves after slipping into a depression their families believe was fueled by using anabolic steroids.

Today, we fix our gaze on a disturbing piece of the steroid puzzle. Studies have shown that growing numbers of young girls are beginning to use steroids. Some of this use is attributed to the desire to improve athletic performance. But some of it is because girls are looking for a way to get thinner, to reduce body fat – to conform to an idea of beauty they feel pressured to emulate.

This is why we are here. Young lives continue to be destroyed or lost due to the illegal use of steroids. It is why I have introduced, along with Ranking Member Henry A. Waxman, and other members of this Committee, legislation to require tougher testing standards for performance-enhancing drugs. The deeper we get into this issue, the more certain I am of the need for federal legislation to address this dangerous, deadly public health crisis.

Our legislation specifically addresses professional sports because that’s the public face of this vicious cycle, that’s where it starts, and that’s where we need to begin to stop it. But we now know that the use of illegal performance-enhancing drugs extends to places once thought impossible.

For example, a survey of high school students conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that 5 percent of high school girls and 7 percent of 9th grade girls had used steroids without a doctor's prescription. Dr. Linn Goldberg, who testified at the Committee's April 20th hearing, and researchers at Oregon Health & Science University – Dr. Diane Elliot will be testifying today – report an increased use of anabolic steroids among high school non-athletes.

Young women appear to be resorting to steroid use as a means of weight control and body-fat reduction – that is, losing fat and gaining lean muscle. The use of steroids for this purpose often goes hand in hand with eating disorders – not to mention the abuse of other drugs – in order to stay thin.

At first glance, it may seem odd to associate the use of steroids with a desire to stay thin. Our mental image of a steroid user is an over-muscled jock. But, as we will hear today, some steroids are thought to act as appetite suppressants, or to burn fat at a faster rate.

Sadly, females suffer particularly devastating health consequences from steroid abuse. Adverse side effects include, but are not limited to, excessive growth of body hair; masculinization; premature arrest of bone development, resulting in stunted growth; irritability, delusion, and depression.

Today, we will hear from several medical experts, some of whom believe steroid use by young women is an underreported problem, and all of whom agree more research and scientific evidence are needed to more accurately quantify how large a problem we face. I look forward to a robust discussion of the extent of this problem, what the numbers tell us, and what information we may be lacking in understanding the whole picture.

Dr. Elliot will also discuss her success with a prevention program called ATHENA – Athletes Targeting Healthy Exercise and Nutrition Alternatives – which is specifically designed for middle- and high-school-aged girls.

Additionally, we are happy to have with us Kelli White, a former World Champion sprinter who has come clean about her decision to use steroids, and about her subsequent regrets, and Mari Holden, a world class cyclist, who will discuss the pressures clean athletes face in competing in an environment where their rivals may be taking performance-enhancing drugs.